

Changing Views: Centre of Slough Strategy

September 2015

Introduction

- 1.1 This document sets out the council's vision and strategy for the centre of Slough as part of its Five Year Plan for the borough.
- 1.2 The council's overall ambition is for Slough to be:
 - a place where people choose to live and work and where children can grow up to achieve their full potential;
 - one of the most attractive places to do business in the country, with excellent communications, business accommodation and a skilled and available workforce.
- 1.3 One of the opportunities and challenges that has been identified in the Five Year Plan is the need to improve the identity and vibrancy of the centre of the town. As a result one of the key "outcomes" of the plan is that "the centre of Slough will be vibrant, providing business, living and cultural opportunities".
- 1.4 Improving the centre can also contribute to some of the other "outcomes" in the Five Year Plan such as providing more quality homes, making Slough safer and improving the image of the town.
- 1.5 The geographical scope of this strategy covers a much wider area than the high street and the narrowly defined area that has been used for planning and other purposes in the past. It is therefore intended to apply to the broad area shown in the plan below.
- 1.6 Although it is not a planning document, it is intended to be used to help to shape and steer the way the centre is developed in the future. It also provides a mechanism for measuring the success of the strategy.



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Vision

- 1.7 The vision is:
“The centre of Slough is where people, businesses, shops, transport and public spaces come together to create an atmospheric, high quality and vibrant urban living environment. A place where the latest technology is harnessed, jobs are created, design is innovative and culture is celebrated.”
- 1.8 In order to do this we need to emphasise the advantage of Slough’s transport links that will make it one of the best connected places to do business. We also need to improve local connections so the centre can properly serve the town. We need to redefine the role of the centre of Slough so it is less dependent upon shopping and becomes a destination for a whole range of uses. This also means celebrating the fact it is different.

Strategy

- 1.9 The main elements are:
- A housing led regeneration
 - Attracting more business
 - Developing new attractions
 - Reshaping the shopping centre
 - Insisting on high quality development
 - Creating a sense of place
 - Taking care of and improving the local environment
 - Making the most of Slough’s place in the world (next to Heathrow, Windsor and the Thames Valley)
 - Getting best value from public and private investment (Slough pound)
 - Connecting the centre with surrounding areas

Housing led regeneration

- 1.10 It is considered that the most commercially viable form of development in the centre of Slough is residential. As a result in order to change the way that the centre of Slough is viewed it is proposed to promote a housing led regeneration which will help the local economy as well as improving the appearance and attractiveness of the centre.
- 1.11 The current core strategy proposed that 3,000 flats would be built in the town centre but it is now envisaged that this could be a lot higher as a result of the high demand, conversion of offices to residential and the new opportunity sites that have arisen around the centre. Although residential may be the main driver of new development it is important that it doesn’t take place in isolation.
- 1.12 This means that we need to create attractive vibrant areas with a mix of uses. It is also important that we get a good quality of design not just of the buildings themselves but also the internal fit out and the surrounding public realm. Currently the vast majority of flats end up being rented out because this is where the demand is particularly from young people. In the future whole blocks are likely to be developed by specialist private rental companies who will have the incentive to manage them well long term.
- 1.13 It is important that we make Slough the location of choice for a new generation of residents who will hopefully shop, work and spend their leisure time there as well. We also need to attract the new and institutional investors in ‘build to rent’ to ensure quality and a range of accommodation and therefore a mix of people and spending power of residents.

- 1.14 There are a number of major opportunity sites in and around the centre. These include the former TVU site, the canal basin, Akzo Nobel (ICI) and National Grid gas works site east of Wexham Road. Whilst these are large enough to create distinctive neighbourhoods with local facilities, it is important that we create attractive links between sites and the centre into make new residents feel they are part of the centre and in turn encourage use of the local amenities on offer. Similarly ensure new residents are happy and feel safe to walk or cycle to the railway and bus station.
- 1.15 Success will look like: a range of new high-quality residential properties with links to the high street, transport and leisure activities.
- 1.17 More office jobs in the centre will not only help local people but also form an important part of the regeneration of the centre of Slough which cannot solely be housing led. It is also important that we get a range of new jobs in the centre and encourage the small incubator type units to come forward which can add vitality and active frontages throughout the centre.
- 1.18 Success will look like: new offices developed and let in particular around the Brunel Junction with new and existing businesses making the centre of Slough their home. Ensuring this positively affects current and new retailers who experience an uptake in revenues as greater demand is generated in lunch time and evening trade.

Attracting more business

- 1.16 Slough centre has lost a number of large office employers in recent years and has not until recently seen much demand for new tenants. A lot of lower grade offices have been lost to residential as a result of the Government's changes to the planning rules which has encouraged the change of use to flats. There are also a number of empty sites with planning permission for offices which have not yet been implemented. Given Slough's locational advantage and its proposed new rail link to Heathrow it is considered that the area around the railway station has the potential to become a "central business district" capable of attracting top firms and a skilled workforce. There are signs that office rents are rising and that confidence is returning to the Slough office market. It is important that we keep our nerve and ensure the office sites in and around the Heart of Slough are retained and are available for the inward investment we can attract back to a revitalised centre.
- 1.19 With shopping likely to have a less important role in the future it is important that we find new reasons for people to visit the centre of Slough. Building more flats and increasing employment should deliver a captive audience but we need to attract other people into the centre. There is already evidence that a "café culture" is beginning to grow in Slough but we need to encourage new dining, leisure and entertainment facilities. This could take a range of forms from creating family orientated leisure and eating area to promoting a night time economy.
- 1.20 The opening of The Curve gives us the possibility of creating a "cultural quarter" around it. We already have a number of hotels but attracting more would bring more visitors and restaurants. The proposal for a conference centre is intended to boost the need for more hotels, leisure, eating and drinking facilities in the centre of Slough.

Developing new attractions

- 1.21 Success will look like: a booming early evening economy with a range of visitor attractions, including quality and attractive hotels, restaurants, cinema, Curve performances and a range of leisure activities.

Reshaping the shopping centre

- 1.22 Traditionally one of the main functions of town centres was to be shopping centres. Things are however changing rapidly both nationally and locally.
- Slough used to be ranked as a “sub regional” shopping centre attracting people from a wide hinterland. The loss of C&A, Littlewoods and Woolworths reflected national changes.
- 1.23 The loss of Gap and New Look from Slough centre reflects more localised changes in the way that people are now shopping in the area. The recent household shopping survey that we commissioned from DTZ showed that Slough was no longer attracting shoppers from outside. Only 10% of Windsor residents and 1% of Maidenhead residents were using Slough town centre for major shopping trips. There was also considerable leakage from within the borough with the centre attracting 45% of Langley residents and 60% of residents in the rest of the town. When asked why they didn't shop in Slough the main reasons were a poor range of non-food shops and an unattractive environment.
- 1.24 Over time we are likely to find that we may have too many shops and too many units with the wrong kind of space. Proposals for the reconfiguration of the Queensmere would help to improve the type and quality of the space on offer. Elsewhere we will have to prune back the amount of shopping floorspace and encourage it to regrow in a different form.

- 1.25 Success will look like: a clean and vibrant shopping area providing a variety, high quality range of shopping experiences including traditional, food, click and collect and leisure which reflects changing times.

Insisting on high quality development

- 1.26 One of the advantages that we have is that there are a number of vacant sites and other areas that are likely to come up for development. They have not all come forward because of a lack of viability and lack of demand due to the economic down turn. There are a number of signs that investor confidence is returning. Whilst encouraging new investment to come forward it is important that we insist upon a high quality of design and don't allow development for development's sake.
- 1.27 It is also important that we remove the few existing eyesores which create a poor impression of Slough. High quality environments can attract business and a wider range of residents which in turn can bring employment, greater spending power and help support a wider range of uses in the town centre. For some developments the extra cost to achieve high quality design might make schemes unviable if Section 106 affordable housing and infrastructure contributions are also sought. A method of assessment needs to be established to help decision making when such policy conflicts occur.
- 1.28 Success will look like: high quality designed new buildings and construction areas with supportive, clean, green and attractive public realm.

Create a sense of place

- 1.21 It is also important that individual developments contribute to creating a distinctive sense of place. There should be pedestrian friendly environments which reflect what is happening around them.
- 1.22 In addition to the "cultural quarter" around The Curve we could have our own "curry mile" at the eastern end of the high street and make the most of the "Herschel connection" around the park.
- 1.23 We should also exploit the views that you can get from high buildings in the centre of Slough which not only allow you to enjoy looking at Windsor Castle but allow people to appreciate that Slough is situated in the attractive Thames Valley. The proposed public viewing gallery on top of one of the Queensmere towers is an example of this.
- 1.24 The principle can be applied elsewhere.
- 1.25 First impressions are important and so we need to make sure the main entrances are attractive for people walking, cycling or driving into or through the centre. The Station forecourt has been improved, the Windsor Road will be transformed, we have plans for the Stoke Road and the proposals for the Queensmere could help the Wellington Street frontage.
- 1.26 Success will look like: clean and attractive gateways into the centre of Slough with facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers, improving the image and people's perceptions and creating a place where people want to live, shop and do business.

Taking care of the environment

- 1.27 It is important that not only should the centre of Slough look as green as possible but also that it is developed in as sustainable way as possible.
- 1.28 This means tackling congestion on the roads, improving air quality and enhancing our important green spaces. It also means that proper investment is made in maintaining the urban realm. It is also important that we need to tackle anti social behaviour and reduce the opportunities for and consequent fear of crime in the centre.
- 1.29 Success will look like: improved and greened public realm alongside transport improvements and more attractive cycling and pedestrian routes. A tree for every new metal post.

Make the most of the Slough's place in the world

- 1.30 It is recognised that the proposed improvements to Slough's transport facilities which will make it one of the best located places in the country.
- 1.31 It is important that we also improve the more local transport links through the introduction of the rapid transit scheme and an improved rail service to Windsor, including the Chalvey Halt. Not only will this make the centre of Slough easier to get to for visitors, it will make it more attractive for people to live and work there.
- 1.32 We should in future promote Slough centre not just on the facilities that it provides but also as an area with access to a lot more complimentary ones such as historic Windsor and attractive countryside.
- 1.31 Success will look like: the centre of Slough to be the best connected place - through road, rail, bus, air, cycling and walking facilities.

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